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TAGS: [EAID](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [ET](#)

SUBJECT: PARTY PATRONAGE AND FOREIGN ASSISTANCE IN ETHIOPIA

REF: A. ADDIS ABABA 31

[B](#). 08 ADDIS ABABA 3370

[C](#). 08 ADDIS ABABA 2159

[D](#). ADDIS ABABA 2645

[E](#). ADDIS ABABA 975

[F](#). ADDIS ABABA 379

[G](#). ADDIS ABABA 2273

[H](#). ADDIS ABABA 1612

Classified By: CDA Roger A. Meece for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

[1](#). (C) Recent allegations of the politicization of foreign assistance in Ethiopia, including humanitarian food aid, are consistent with reports by non-governmental organizations, opposition political parties, the media, and members of the international donor community. The manipulation of humanitarian assistance for political benefit by the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) since 2005 should be viewed in the context of broader efforts to utilize government resources to ensure EPRDF's political and electoral supremacy. U.S. foreign assistance is less vulnerable than many countries' aid because the USG insists on maintaining a large measure of control over the mechanics of aid distribution. Post strongly endorses the Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) as the most effective and most closely monitored assistance program of its kind and urges other donors to adopt PSNP-type anti-manipulation safeguards.

Although USAID is confident that PSNP funds are being directed to legitimate beneficiaries, EPRDF members may well be receiving priority. Efforts to monitor food distribution are aimed at making sure vulnerable people are fed and cannot be expanded to include investigation of political pressures applied to those people without jeopardizing that primary mission. End summary.

Increased Political Patronage Since 2005

[2](#). (C) Since the controversial 2005 elections, the Government of Ethiopia (GoE) has engaged in a systematic campaign to tighten control over opposition parties and their allies. The closure of political space has been achieved in part by the passage of restrictive laws governing civil society (Ref A), political parties (Ref B), and the media (Ref C), the intimidation of opposition candidates campaigning in their constituencies (Ref D), as well as the purging of ethnic groups perceived as disloyal to the ruling party from the military (Ref E) and civil service (Ref F). As the GoE has used its network of local officials to enforce these new rules, Post has received multiple reports that the GoE is also using the complete spectrum of government resources - including many basic public services - in a patronage system to shore up support for the EPRDF.

13. (C) Post has reported specific complaints of patronage and coercive recruitment techniques used by the government, such as the use of military facilities and civil service trainings for political indoctrination (Ref G), the withholding of food aid, seeds, and fertilizers to non-EPRDF members (Ref H), and preferential treatment in job assignment, promotion, and professional development for EPRDF members (Ref H). In one recent allegation, opposition Member of Parliament Bulcha Demeksa, of the Oromo Federalist Democratic Movement (OFDM), told Post that local EPRDF cadres had asked his constituents to join the party during the same visits in which they distributed seed and fertilizer. He said that voters who refused to join did not receive seed or fertilizer in the next round of distribution. Beyond these specific allegations, Mission officers are frequently told by contacts that it is commonly understood that eligibility for government services is made easier by party membership as a practical matter. This practice is felt most strongly in rural areas, where many Ethiopians are dependent on food assistance and agricultural inputs such as seeds and fertilizer, and where local officials can more easily monitor the political activities of their constituents.

14. (C) The GoE has attempted to silence reports of patronage and coercive action, as in the recent case of journalist Wossenseged Meshesha (protect), of Mesenazaria newspaper. In a recent article, Wossenseged quoted opposition United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF) leader Beyene Petros describing incidents in which his constituents had been forced to make financial contributions to the EPRDF upon receiving seed and fertilizer. Despite the fact that the

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statements he printed were directly quoted and backed up by hard copies of receipts the farmers were given for their forced contributions, Wossenseged is now being sued by the GoE for defamation. In a November 10 press conference the opposition Forum for Democratic Dialogue (Forum) publicly criticized in general terms the ruling party's use of government and donor resources for political patronage, resulting in a series of local and international media reports on the politicization of food aid. Several international NGOs have researched the issue as well, including Human Rights Watch, which plans to release a report on the general issue of politicization of government services in January 2010.

Foreign Assistance Vulnerable to Politicization

15. (SBU) As reports of patronage have increased since 2005, Post has become keenly aware that foreign assistance, including U.S. humanitarian assistance, is vulnerable to politicization. Direct budget support, which the USG does not provide but is favored by many donors, is the most vulnerable form of assistance. As an example, Post has received numerous reports of graft and politicization of donor support provided through the Provision of Basic Services (PBS) program, which provides block grants to regional governments and is coordinated by the World Bank. (Note: The USG does not contribute to PBS. End note.) Emergency relief food is also vulnerable to politicization, owing to the large volume of food transferred and the urgent need to distribute it quickly. USAID and its partners closely monitor the distribution of most relief food distributed by NGO partners and WFP through the "hubs and spokes" system now used in the Somali Region, which allows for better control over distribution at the local level. Urgent needs and limited geographic coverage by NGOs sometimes necessitate distribution which transfers food resources directly to the GoE. (Note: The Mission continues to press WFP to ensure greater transparency and accountability in relief food distribution, and much progress has been made over the past year since the "hubs and spokes" system went into effect in October, 2008. End note.)

¶6. (SBU) PSNP, to which the U.S. is a major contributor, is a highly monitored program operated by the GoE and NGOs with donor support that provides cash and food to more than seven million Ethiopians in exchange for labor, in a graduated system designed to move families toward food security. While PSNP has been the object of allegations of politicization leveled by the opposition (including those in Ref H) and has received recent media coverage, PSNP has easily the best safeguards in this regard among all assistance programs in Ethiopia. These safeguards include semiannual "Joint Review of Implementation and Support" missions, quarterly financial audits, targeting studies, Rapid Response Team field visits, regular beneficiary benefit transfer reports, and an appeals system. The strong support PSNP receives from the donor community is a result of these safeguards and the fact that PSNP is more closely monitored than other programs.

USG and Other Donor Action on PSNP

¶7. (SBU) In recognition of the vulnerability of foreign assistance to politicization, USAID and other PSNP donors have examined transparency in PSNP selection of beneficiaries and distribution of assistance, and agreed upon a framework to ensure accountability and investigate allegations of corruption and politicization. An independent study conducted in 2008 showed that 85% of PSNP participants believe the selection process is fair, and a recent USAID Fiduciary Risk Study revealed no evidence of direct political interference. Although the forthcoming HRW report reportedly cites examples of PSNP-related corruption in times of extreme food insecurity, when some monitoring safeguards are relaxed in order to expedite distribution, USAID is confident that PSNP resources are not directed to unqualified (i.e., food secure) families as a result of political connections. USAID notes, however, that the percentage of families who qualify for PSNP (i.e., the poorest, most food insecure households) who actually receive PSNP support is higher in the Tigray and Amhara regions (considered to be the most loyal to the ruling party) than in other regions of the country that are equally needy (e.g., Oromia and Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples Regions). This trend is not limited to PSNP, but

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rather applies to many government-provided services and benefits. (Note: For years, the Somali Regional State was denied nearly all government services and foreign assistance, for similar reasons. This has largely been reversed.)

¶8. (SBU) USAID's recent Fiduciary Risk Study confirmed that families known to local officials (who are usually EPRDF members) are more likely to receive PSNP support. It is also possible that opposition party members hide their political sentiments in an attempt to avoid repercussions, that they are afraid to voice their concerns to donor monitors, or that politicization is simply not overt. While Post is confident that local officials are not checking voter ID cards when selecting beneficiaries, for example, party affiliation is well known in remote areas and may subtly influence decisions.

¶9. (SBU) Amy Martin, Deputy Director of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA), told PolOff recently that media coverage of the politicization of food aid is a welcome wake-up call in OCHA's efforts to make donors recognize the problem. Some donor representatives in country have noted that if these reports continue, their governments are likely to take further action, up to and including cutting support for various aid programs. In a statement released on November 18 during a visit to Ethiopia, British International Development Minister Gareth Thomas called on the GoE to investigate allegations of the politicization of food aid, and stated that the UK would make "tough decisions" regarding its foreign assistance if necessary.

Comment

¶10. (C) The politicization of humanitarian assistance, including both emergency relief food and distributions made through structured programs such as PSNP, is merely one example of the GoE's utilization of government resources to strengthen support for the ruling party, and should be viewed in the context of all EPRDF preparations for the 2010 elections. While U.S. humanitarian assistance is less vulnerable to GoE manipulation because it is provided through neutral NGOs and structured programs, all assistance is vulnerable. PSNP, which has received much scrutiny of late, is an easy target because of its high visibility, but it is in fact less susceptible to politicization than most aid.

¶11. (C) Closer scrutiny of the potential vulnerability of PSNP and other USG assistance to politicization would carry significant risk. Mission staff (including direct-hire officers, locally engaged staff, and third party consultants) with the most direct access to beneficiaries are of course those whose primary task is distribution of assistance. On the other hand, individuals with whom political staff meet to discuss such issues are commonly visited thereafter by local officials in their homes or offices, or taken by local police to security services offices for questioning about their perceived disloyal activities. Blurring the lines between distribution of assistance and the monitoring of political pressures brought to bear on beneficiaries risks putting the assistance programs themselves in jeopardy from a ruling party that has become confident that its vast patronage system is largely invulnerable. End comment.

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